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INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1935
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 5413
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 9006
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6582
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 4401
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2390
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000255

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP, IO AND DRL
PACOM FOR FPA
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/05/2019
TAGS: [ELAB](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [BM](#)
SUBJECT: BURMA: ILO SHEDS LIGHT ON LABOR ARRESTS

Classified By: Economic Officer Samantha A. Carl-Yoder for reasons 1.4
(b and d).

Summary

11. (C) ILO Liaison Officer Steve Marshall (strictly protect) confirmed the GOB detained and subsequently released four Federation of Trade Unions Burma (FTUB) members on April 10 for illegally crossing the Thai-Burma border. Government officials denied the arrest of a fifth FTUB member, as reported in an FTUB statement. Marshall reports that GOB investigations indicate the four individuals are not actually members of the FTUB, but are relatives of FTUB staff who were allegedly paid to participate in the FTUB's First National Congress. The GOB, allegedly determining that the "members" were likely duped by the FTUB into participating in the conference and did not pose a terrorist threat (the GOB considers the FTUB a terrorist organization), released the arrestees and dropped all charges. Marshall, who will meet with the four individuals during the next week to confirm the GOB's report, surmised that the FTUB likely paid them to participate to show FTUB success in establishing trade unions in Burma. End Summary.

Four, Not Five, Detained in
Conjunction with FTUB Congress

12. (SBU) According to an April 8 Federation of Trade Unions Burma press release, five members of the FTUB who traveled from Burma to Mae Sot to attend the First National Congress of the FTUB were arrested on April 1 upon their return to Burma. The statement alleged that the Burmese military unlawfully detained and tortured them. In response, the Executive Secretary of the International Labor Organization (ILO) sent a letter to the Minister of Labor on April 8, urging the immediate release of the five labor unionists and emphasizing that attending a trade union meeting is a legitimate activity under the Convention of the Freedom of Association. The FTUB subsequently reported that the five members were released on April 10.

13. (C) According to ILO Liaison Officer Steve Marshall, the Burmese Government quickly responded to the ILO's request,

referring the case to the Burmese Working Group on Forced Labor for investigation. The Working Group began its investigation on April 9, meeting with the detainees and police officials involved in the case. Marshall noted that, according to the Deputy Minister for Labor, the GOB detained four, not five, FTUB members because they illegally crossed the border. The Deputy Minister emphasized that they were not detained because of their affiliation with the FTUB. The four members were released on April 10, and all charges were dropped, the Deputy Minister told Marshall.

True FTUB Members?

14. (C) According to Marshall, GOB officials learned during the investigation that all four FTUB members, close relatives of the FTUB General Secretary Maung Maung's personal assistant, were invited to visit family in Thailand. The four arrestees allegedly admitted to Working Group members that they illegally crossed the border into Mae Sot, where FTUB leadership asked them to participate in the National Congress, even though they are not union members. Furthermore, only two of the four individuals are employed in Burma. They were allegedly paid USD 4,000 each to attend the National Congress. Investigators concluded that the four were not FTUB members, as they knew little about labor issues. Additionally, Working Group members agreed to drop the immigration charges, on the grounds that they had been "duped" by the FTUB into participating in the conference and did not pose a threat to Burma (though this would appear to contradict GOB claims that the basis for the arrest was

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illegal border crossing and not due to affiliation with a "terrorist" organization).

15. (C) Marshall told us he is seeking a meeting with the four individuals soon to confirm the GOB's story and investigate the FTUB's torture allegations. He will seek an explanation for the FTUB's press release, and will also inquire whether the four still have the USD 4,000 they were allegedly paid. While Marshall emphasized that the ILO regards the FTUB to be a legitimate trade organization, he surmised privately that the FTUB may be trying too hard to show its ability to foster trade union development in Burma.

Comment

16. (C) This incident is strange, even for Burma. The four arrestees reportedly claimed they are not members of the FTUB or any union, so it is unclear why the FTUB would issue a statement about their arrest, other than to attract international attention. Marshall, a reputable source with extensive experience in Burma, believes the four were, in fact, paid to pose as labor activists. That would seem to raise serious concerns about the FTUB's National Congress.

DINGER